SEL Assessment Use Cases
Answering Questions and Making Decisions for Individuals and Groups of Students

Background on SEL Assessments

In schools, educators and psychologists use assessments because they have questions to answer and decisions to make about the support students need to improve their knowledge and skills. Assessments, if appropriately constructed, can be used to answer an array of questions and provide evidence for making important decisions. The decisions to be made range from low to high stakes and focus on groups and/or individual students.

In the social emotional learning (SEL) Assessment domain, there are a number of types of assessment, with the most widely used being behavior rating scales that focus on the observed frequency estimates of discrete skills or behaviors. These SEL skills are often determined to represent one or more competencies/constructs such as self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationships, and responsible decision making.

Over the past decade, I have published and used an array of behavior rating scales to assess students' social emotional competencies. These assessment include: the *Social Skills Improvement System (SSIS) Rating Scales – Teacher, Student, & Parent versions (Gresham & Elliott, 2008); the SSIS SEL Screening and Progress Monitoring Scales (Elliott & Gresham, 2017); the SSIS SEL Rating Form-Teacher, Student, & Parent versions (Gresham & Elliott, 2017); and the SSIS Brief SEL Scales (Elliott, Gresham, DiPerna, Anthony, & Lei, in press).* This family of SEL assessments has been designed to be content aligned with the CASEL Framework of SEL Competencies and an intervention program called the *SSIS SEL Classwide Intervention Program (CIP; Elliott & Gresham, 2017)*. The CIP is in use in over two thousand schools in the United States, Australia, Canada, and England. When there is substantial alignment of content across a competency framework like that advanced by CASEL, assessment items, and instructional units, the number and quality of decisions for which assessment results can be used expands. Assuming there is supportive evidence for the reliability and validity of the resulting assessment scores, content aligned assessments can be used to "connect and operationalize" competency frameworks to intervention programs, and ultimately help evaluate their effectiveness.

Use Case Examples

The following use case examples focus on the use of the SSIS SEL assessments. Other assessments, however, in some situations, could be used to replace or to supplement the assessments highlighted. The examples are not exhaustive, rather they are intended to illustrate the application of different types of SEL assessments for providing data-based evidence for addressing fundamental questions educators have about schools, programs, and students. Note that assessments with strong psychometrics, representative norming samples, and built-in validity indices often can be used for collecting evidence needed to make decisions about groups of students and individual students. Many SEL assessments are initiated using a group data collection approach with students providing self-assessed information. Adding teachers or parents into the assessment process facilitates more individualized decisions.

Assessment Actions and Decisions with Groups of Students

School Accountability. Use the SSIS SEL Rating Forms – Student and Teacher versions (51 items) or the more time efficient SSIS SEL Brief Scales – Student and Teacher versions (20 items) to generate evidence to answer questions such as: *How well is the entire student body functioning with regard to state/district expectations or standards*? To generate the needed evidence, have all students complete Ratings and all teachers

complete ratings for a random representative sample of students. Summarize scores for all students and subgroups (i.e., grades, special education and general education, male and female, racial/ethnic groups) and report by competency levels (e.g., well above average, above average, average, below average, and well below average).

School Improvement. Use the SSIS SEL Rating Forms – Student and Teacher versions or the more time efficient SSIS SEL Brief Scales – Student and Teacher versions to generate evidence to answer questions such as: *Has the student body increased it level of SEL competence over the course of the year or from last year to this year?* To generate the needed evidence, collect assessment data near the beginning of school year (October) and at the end of school year (May) for the same sample of students and teacher raters to determine change; all students complete Ratings and all teachers complete ratings for a random representative sample of students. Summarize scores for all students and subgroups (i.e., grades, special education and general education, male and female, racial/ethnic groups) and report by competency levels (e.g., well above average, above average, average, below average, and well below average).

Program Improvement. Use the SSIS SEL Rating Forms – Student and Teacher versions or the more time efficient SSIS SEL Brief Scales – Student and Teacher versions to collect evidence to address questions such as: *Have students who completed Program X improved their SEL overall and subdomain competencies?* To collect the evidence to address this type of question, collect data near the beginning of the school year (October) and at the end of school year (May) with the same sample of students and teacher raters to determine if change in skills occurred. Ideally, select a business-as-usual control group for comparisons; all students complete Ratings and all teachers complete ratings for a random representative sample of students. Summarize scores for all students and subgroups (i.e., grades, special education and general education, male and female, racial/ethnic groups) and report by competency levels (e.g., well above average, above average, average, below average, and well below average).

Classroom Improvement. Use the SSIS SEL Screening and Progress Monitoring Scales (teacher only assessment) and SSIS SEL Brief Scales – Student version to collect evidence to address a question such as: *Are students in my classroom improving their overall and subdomain SEL competencies over the course of the year*? Near the beginning of the school year (October) and at the end of school year (May) administer the assessments with the same sample of students and teacher raters to determine change; Some teachers do a mid-year assessment resulting in 3 assessment points (Fall, Winter, Spring); All students complete Ratings and teacher completes ratings for all students. Summarize scores for all students and subgroups (i.e., grades, special education and general education, male and female, racial/ethnic groups) and report by competency levels (e.g., well above average, above average, average, below average, and well below average).

Assessment Actions and Decisions with Individual Students

Screening for SEL Strengths and Areas in Need of Improvement (Intervention). Use the SSIS SEL Rating Forms – Teacher, Student, and/or Parent or the SSIS Brief SEL Scales to determine individual students' relative SEL competency domain strengths and areas in need of improvement. A typical question being addressed is: *What are the student's relative SEL strengths and areas in need of improvement?* Most likely this question and the evidence needed to address it are part of a comprehensive baseline assessment for a school-wide or class-wide universal SEL program. One can use one or more raters to facilitate a comprehensive perspective on each student and to advance communications about the identification of student support needed to improve each student's skills.

Screening for Social and Mental Health Areas in Need of Targeted Support (Intervention). Use the SSIS Brief Social and Mental Health Scales – Teacher, Student, and/or Parent versions to identify students' areas of relative strengths and weaknesses and to note performance levels indicative of possible social or mental health difficulties. A typical question addressed in this situation is: *What are the student's areas of difficulties that may indicate a moderate level of health risk to himself/herself or others?* Any individual student initially identified as functioning with social or mental difficulties should be reassessed with the original assessment and perhaps with

additional measures. Decisions about needed education support services (Tier 2 or Tier 3; not special education services at this time) are needed to address the difficulties should follow.

Assessment for Personalized SEL Interventions. Use the SSIS SEL Rating Form – Teacher, Student, and/or Parent versions and the SSIS SEL CIP program to identify a student's specific SEL skill strengths and weaknesses and their alignment to instructional skill units. Based on available time for intervention, prioritize SEL skills in greatest need of improvement and provide instruction to advance the quality and frequency of these skills. The typical question being addressed in this situation is: *What specific SEL skills does this student need to improve to enhance his/her social emotional functioning and enable academic engagement*?

Diagnosis for Social or Mental Health Difficulties. Use the SSIS Rating Scales – Teacher, Student, and/or Parent versions to document norm-referenced strengths and weaknesses in areas of social skills and problem behaviors or consider the forthcoming SSIS Brief Social and Mental Health Scales (Elliott, Gresham, DiPerna, Anthony, & Lei, in press). The data from this assessment must be supplemented with other forms of direct evidence before finalizing a diagnosis needed for specialized educational services. Some of the other evidence might come from SEL assessments and poor outcomes for SEL interventions at Tiers 1, 2, or 3. The typical question being addressed in this situation is: *Are this student's social and mental health behaviors significantly different than expectations for his/her age/grade and indicative of students known to be classified as having a disability*?

In Summary

Don't just use any assessment of SEL skills and behaviors to guide your understanding and decision making regarding students. Think about the question(s) you want to answer and the evidence you need to answer the question(s) well. Then consider evidence sources, available time, user training, and cost. Finally, select an assessment that has substantial evidence to support the reliability and validity of its scores for students like yours.

About SSIS Collaborative (ssiscolab.com)

The mission of the SSIS Collaborative is threefold:
1. Support the practices and professional development of educators and psychologists who use SSIS assessment and intervention products.
2. Support research and evidence-based practice initiatives committed to improving social, emotional, and academic functioning of children 3 to 18 years of age.
3. Collaborate with colleagues to advance the development of promising assessments and intervention tools that contribute to a positive school climate and educational productive of students.

Collaborating with others is part of our DNA and essential to advancing high-quality SEL products, practices, and professional development. Our collaborations are with…..

Professionals who use the SSIS to enhance their efforts to assess and teach students social emotional learning (SEL) skills enable success at school and in their communities.

Researchers and Practitioners to advance SEL assessment, intervention, and program evaluation knowledge and skills needed to ensure high quality services to students.

Pearson Assessment who publishes many outstanding assessment products including the SSIS and SSIS SEL Edition assessments and Classwide Assessment core materials.

Stay in touch and stay up to date on aligned SEL assessment and intervention programs. Visit www.ssiscolab.com.

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